



# The RECLUSE of FIFTH AVENUE

by WYNDHAM MARTYN

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(Continued)

After dinner came a dance, and the evasion of the two elder Raxon girls was not easy. Robin looked sourly at an animated and gesticulating Frenchman—a viscount, as he recalled it—who carried on a long conversation in his native tongue with Miss Brown.

Only once Robin stared into the violet eyes. They seemed to look through him. But he was sure Miss Brown remembered that moment when there was a reasonably good chance of the extinction of the McKimber family.

Finally poor Robin had to introduce himself. He did it very well. It came in the nature of an apology. Robin was so good-looking that most girls forgave him minor breaches of etiquette.

"My name is Robin McKimber," he began. "And as I know you are Miss Brown, we are introduced, aren't we?" "And this is your idea of an introduction?" Miss Brown spoke without enthusiasm. He was a little staggered.

"I had to introduce myself," he returned, "because nobody else would." "Exactly what was the necessity?" she demanded.

"I wanted to apologize for nearly running you down on the drive this afternoon." She was not making it easy. "I'm afraid you exaggerate," she said calmly. "I was standing on a rock fully two feet above the road level when you turned the corner so recklessly."

"I do," he said earnestly. "Then you must apologize to your parents. They were in real danger and I was not." "I'm a most careful driver," he said. "Ask my mother. What happened to-day never happened to me before."

"What was that?" There was a trace of a smile which passed over her face and was gone. "I saw that eyes could really be violet," he answered. He looked into them admiringly. "I forgot everything."

"You should lose your license," she said severely. But there was no doubt that she smiled as she turned away with a slight bow. She was more used to verbal fencing than he had imagined. On the whole, he decided he had behaved very stupidly. This was no brown-beaten dependent thirsting for kind words. Robin's evening was spoiled.

John McKimber was puzzled concerning Paul Raxon. He had known of Raxon for years, but he had never met him nor believed very much in his influence. McKimber had thought of him as a younger man who would look up to him as one having long ago won his spurs. McKimber had come here sure that victory would be his in the struggle.

To this retreat none came but the servants. Here he dreamed of power and planned the new life. None could overhear what he would say to McKimber when the hour came to which he had long looked forward. There would be no tinkling telephones to interrupt. He chuckled as he thought of McKimber. He knew the manufacturer for an honest if stubborn man, who had long been regarded as a valued party prop. Well, the McKimber who would come to this talk would not be the man who went down the tower stairs.

Life had been very good to Paul Raxon. He had always won. Again and again his unfortunate entanglements with women had threatened to bring him newspaper notoriety, but he had evaded it—somehow. He wondered why, of late, he had been thinking of the girl who died so conveniently in a sculptor's studio, the sculptor who had endured the censure that should have been his. Raxon believed that it was because he had been born to a great destiny, and doubts of future success did not trouble him.

McKimber broached the subject that filled their minds one day as they walked back from golf. He had been shown by his campaign manager that Raxon's press notices far exceeded his own in frequency and interest. "You certainly have a fine press agent," McKimber said, not without bitterness.

"The best," said Raxon. "So long as he remains the best he gets a very large salary. If he falls off, I shall get rid of him. He knows that. One might say," Raxon went on, "that that is my method always. I pay more than the union scale, because I want a result above the average." "Maybe you're wasting your money," Raxon shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe."

"The public buildings of this country are the best in the world," McKimber declared. He had been reading something of the enthusiasm Raxon had created among federations of women's clubs. "You probably think so," Raxon agreed idly. "You could sit before the statehouse at, let us say, Harrisburg, and think it was the last thing in architectural art. I am going to stamp out monstrosities in stone and melodramas in marble. We have not yet evolved a national style, but we shall."

He paused a moment to greet Robin McKimber and Agatha Brown. He had noticed of late that the two were very friendly. They made a splendid pair. He commented on it. McKimber grunted. He had other plans for his son. He found himself filled with increasing bitterness. "When can we have a talk?" McKimber said abruptly. "What are we doing now?" "You know what I mean. I'm going

you up there at twelve."

McKimber felt himself dismissed. He frowned as he glanced at the smaller man. The interview in the tower room would need careful handling. He wondered if he had underestimated Raxon.

When Robin joined him McKimber was still fuming. Unwisely he told his son of the coming interview, but not of its nature. Still more unwisely Robin, by this time head over ears in love with Agatha Brown, confided in her the news. She had always seemed ready to chat about his parents. "I don't understand it at all," said Robin. "Father came here for some purpose of his own which I haven't caught on to, but it's political. Of course you haven't learned American politics of late or you'd know my father was some punkin up the state. He refused the nomination for governorship."

"Why such modesty?" she asked. "Because he wants something big."

"The senate, I suppose?" "Yes, I wondered why it was he came here when we have never had any social relations with the Raxons. I know now." He spoke confidentially. "Tomorrow night, up in his tower room, father is going to lay down the law to your Mr. Raxon. Just because Raxon made a lot of money doesn't say he is fit to represent New York at Washington. I think father pays entirely too much attention to Raxon's claims. He couldn't get in possibly. What do you think?" "That politics is very dull."

"They won't bother us," he said tenderly. "We shan't know they exist. Agatha, I shall be looking in your eyes and forgetting time and space." "That will make you a very agreeable dancing partner," she laughed. She sighed a little. "I'm sorry, Robin, but we shall not be dancing together tomorrow evening. It is my night off, and I'm going to see some friends in New York."

"I'll come with you," he said eagerly. "Do let me drive you in." "That would never do. I should be dismissed directly I returned. No, you must stay here and dance with the Raxon girls and their friends. "Don't you realize how much you've neglected them?" "I didn't come here to dance with them," he retorted. "I came in the first instance because father has something to tell Raxon from the national committee. I stayed because I saw you. If I've neglected the Raxon girls it is absolutely your fault. They should blame you for it."

"They do," she answered. "Mrs. Raxon, who was my friend, is growing cold. I shall not be here long." "Then marry me and get a lifelong job. You'll like it, sweetheart. I'm not half good enough for you, but day by day you'll learn to love me more and more."

"Is this a proposal?" She laughed. "It's the first I've made since lunch," he returned. "And I shall give you my usual answer. I like you, Robin. You are one of the most attractive people I have met. I think it would not be hard to get absolutely crazy about you."

"How soon can you start?" "I'm afraid I never can. Your father wouldn't permit it. I've watched him, Robin, when you've been dancing or talking to me. Do you suppose it was just idly that he told me last night that he had a great future planned for you?" "He often says that," Robin answered. "That's why he wants to go to Washington. He's thinking of politics and diplomacy."

"He was thinking of the sort of woman he intends you to marry. I can't blame him. He feels he is fighting for you against an unknown woman who may be a common adventuress for all he knows. On the whole, I rather like your father."

"The old man's all right," Robin said calmly. "and I probably respect him more than anyone else; but I'm no Chinese ancestor worshiper. I shall choose my own wife. If he objects, the loss is his." "You'd starve, my bold and brave Robin."

"Not on your life, Amethysta. I'm no idle society boy, although I play society games. I've an interest in the works which I earned. He'd have to buy me out, and it would be cheaper to have me remain. Also, I control some basic patents that he uses. I invented them, if you can believe it."

"How clever of you," she cried. "Do you know I had no idea you had ever worked. You play so well, you see." "Amethysta," he said earnestly, "there isn't such an awful lot of happiness in this world. Why do you want to rob me of my chance of it?" "If there was anything I could do to make you happy, I would do it if I had myself only to think about. Don't follow me. I've got to get back to the house and arrange an elaborate menu."

She left him with a smile. It was not easy to respond to it. So far in his life young McKimber had obtained what he wanted. He realized that he had never wanted anything very strongly until now, when his first serious defeat had been met. "Inside the house Agatha Brown met Enry."

"You allow that McKimber boy to monopolize too much of your time," he grumbled; "the McKimbers are absolutely without social weight."

"In so many words that is what Mr. McKimber told Robin about social setbacks. Don't talk about him now. I've got to go into New York and see Uncle Peter."

"Anything developed?" he demanded eagerly. "Yes. At midnight tomorrow—there's a big dance here, you remember. Mr. McKimber is going to see Mr. Raxon and tell him he has no chance politically."

"How do you know that? So you are pumping him. Clever girl. That's why you are letting him wave his time."

"It's not being clever," she returned, flushing; "it's being dishonorable. I'm not pumping him. I'm letting him talk, and that's almost as bad."

The man who was Enry seemed little interested in Robin McKimber. He was excited at the idea of the interview on the morrow. "I believe that's the big thing," he said. "I wish I knew what old Peter has up his sleeve."

"Has Mr. Bradney finished his work up there?" she asked. "This very morning. That's the real reason I waited for you. That d—d Raxon has no fixed habits. He crops up in most unexpected places. Sneed reported after breakfast that he and old McKimber were on the golf links. Bradney got busy at once with his job and I attended to the cleaning of the room. I didn't hear Raxon come in. You know how silently he walks. Suddenly I looked around and saw him. He made a motion for me not to say anything. He was listening."

"Enry laughed. "I didn't laugh then, Nita. What do you think it was?" He thought old Bradney sawing a board out of sight was a rat. Fortunately Bradney had just finished and was listening to what we were saying. Raxon's afraid of no man, but he hates rats. He made me look down behind the books. I could see Bradney's face distinctly, because he hadn't quite finished. I was flustered. I said I saw a big sewer rat."

"Poor Uncle Fleming," Nita cried. "Oh, daddy, what a situation!" "Raxon suggested sending for a fox terrier that the head chauffeur owns. Any decent dog would have worried Bradney's face to ribbons. I couldn't have that. I suggested traps and said the 'Igginses had a bait that old Henry the Eighth used. He said the rat would take it and die in such a way that the rat would be poisoned. He went to a drawer and took out an automatic. I thought then and there everything was up. I couldn't let him take a pot-shot at Bradney. Remember, Bradney was listening to all this and not able to make a move."

"Oh, daddy," the girl cried, "what happened?" "The 'Igginses' rat-bait won. I said to shoot under a heavy wooden bookcase might set the house on fire. It wasn't till I saw him outside with Malet that I pulled Bradney out head foremost. Of course he blamed me for not keeping a better lookout. It all came because I was actually doing the work for which I am being paid. Let me know what Mr. Milman says."

Neeland Barnes walked toward the pantry, where Bradney was cleaning some silver. "Hello, old sewer rat," said Enry genially. He took a seat and lighted a cigarette. Then he complained about young McKimber's attentions to his daughter. Bradney did not take his side.

"I've watched them," said Bradney. "and I think they are the handsomest pair I've ever seen. You must admit that, physically, he is superb. You are wrong in thinking he is forcing unwelcome attentions on Nita. He is humble and adoring. I'm not much of a judge of these affairs, but I think she likes him." Bradney sighed. "I should like to be looked at as I've caught her looking at him."

"And I rather like old McKimber," Bradney said. "It is true he has drunk the wine of Babbity largely, but that is what every successful man quaffs. If he is autocratic and wants his way, you must remember he is the head of a tremendous business and accustomed to men taking orders from him. His wife is quite genial and unaffected." Barnes could not dismiss his grievance against the family lightly. "I hope he won't try to be autocratic with me because I'm annoyed with his son and heir." Enry put a silver canteen on a tray. "This waiting business pulls after a time. There's Malet eating, drinking and smoking with the best, while we have to work for a living. Actually he had the nerve to call me down the other night in French because I upset something over him while I was trying to hear what Raxon was saying to McKimber."

"Don't get quarrelsome here," Bradney cautioned him. "Wait till it is finished. A great deal depends on you."

"All right," said Barnes, picking up his tray. "The parasite departs. I'll watch my step."

CHAPTER IX  
Very ungraciously Mrs. Raxon permitted Agatha Brown to be absent for a night. Very gladly the Raxon girls learned of it. Robin would be theirs for a few hours. After tramping continental pensions and small hotels, their present lavish life rather went to their heads. It took the form of a superiority complex which irritated Robin enormously. But he irritated his father to aid him by preserving a heartiness of manner that he did not feel. He was wholly obsessed

by the thought of Agatha, that strange and lovely girl who held him at arm's length, snubbed him, harassed him, and then brought him back with a glance of those amethyst eyes. She would tell him nothing about her past life, and that worried him very much. What men had loved her, he wondered, and had there been men about whom she cared? Mrs. McKimber understood the situation and sympathized. Her husband was unusually irritable. He could talk about nothing but the infamous manner in which his press agent neglected to have him featured. It seemed to McKimber that the papers were filled with Paul Raxon. Actually some club women had started a "Better Architecture League," with Raxon as president. They were to agitate for classes in architectural appreciation in the high schools.

McKimber wandered about the big rooms fidgeting. Raxon was not to be seen. At midnight, when Sneed stood respectfully at his elbow, McKimber was as nearly nervous as he had ever been. But he was too old a campaigner to show it. He followed the butler into a big sexagonal room, entrance to which was gained by a flight of eight stairs. That the apartment was furnished with subdued splendor and was of magnificent proportions added to McKimber's irritation. Instinctively he was aware that Raxon was getting ready to use his lavish settings in publicity work.

This tower study would soon be famous through the magazines. It was easy to visualize Paul Raxon leaning back in his customary indolent way with a specially prepared background. McKimber's private room represented office furnishing in its most efficient style. He reflected bitterly that this apartment must have been planned for photographic reproduction. McKimber decided it was effeminate. It provoked in him a feeling of contempt which could not dispel the knowledge that Raxon's settings were

(Continued on page 5)

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to let you into our confidence, and you ought to know that strangers shouldn't hear it."

"Whose confidence?" "The party's confidence. It's a big thing, Raxon."

"Ought I to hear it? Am I important enough?" Raxon's manner had no hint of sarcasm in it, but McKimber knew that the other was laughing at him. "Tomorrow night the young people are having a dance. I keep late hours. What about midnight? You have never yet been in my tower study, have you? Sneed shall bring